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VICTORIA INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

FOR BOYS

MIMICO. ONTARIO

CHESTER FERRIER.
SUPERINTENDENT

PHONES:
LAKESIDE 0182
NEW TORONTO—31

Oct. 9-1931.

THE BOY WITH A POOR CHANCE

The Victoria Industrial School has had to deal with three types of boys; the normal, the sub-normal, and what may be called in lieu of some better name, the criminal type, and yet I dislike the term and never use it when speaking of this class. By it I mean boys who have had a Juvenile Court record and are technically known as the criminal class. I do not think any boy under sixteen years of age should be termed a criminal. I am satisfied the same school should not include these various types. The mentally-retarded with an I.Q. not higher than 60 should receive training in institutions for that class but unfortunately the accommodation in our provincial institutions for the care of such children is not adequate and has not been for some years. As a result our industrial schools have been asked to receive some of these. These schools are not properly equipped for the care and training of feeble-minded children. The Victoria Industrial School has established auxiliary classes for such mentally-retarded boys who would probably not profit by further academic instruction.

Who are the boys who have had a poor chance and have drifted into wrong-doing?

The boy who has been the subject of neglect by parents or others. The boy who has had a court record. The boy who has poor mentality. The boy who has not been given, or has failed to use the education our public school provides, the habitual truants, if you like. Then there is the boy who dislikes work or who has not been trained to work. The boy with low ideals, with weak will power, often weakened by repeated wrong-doing. These are some of the types with whom I have lived and worked for many years. One gets to know boys when he lives with them seven days in the week, ready at any call night or day. This is a class of service that takes the best one has to give. It may be quite an easy matter to write from an office desk on the subject of how to deal with boys and to guide an institution where they are placed. It is quite another problem to deal practically with them. Some years ago I listened to a very learned and eloquent sermon by a young, unmarried man addressed to mothers on how to train and rear their children. Some one was heard to tender him this advice, "Keep that sermon until you are a mother." Too often those who have most to say about the training of children are those who have had little experience.

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I wish to refer to some of the causes that are responsible for the wrong-doing of boys. To reduce this to concrete examples I have taken the records of the last two hundred boys admitted to the Victoria Industrial School. Twenty-five per cent are considered "mentally retarded" or what may be classed as the sub-normal. These do not include the backward boys whose education has been neglected at certain ages with the result that they have retarded mental growth not to be mistaken for the sub-normal. Thirty-six were committed for breaking in and theft, seventy-five for petty theft offences, fourteen for theft of autos, seven for serious offences. The rest may be classed as "Incorrigibles." Some have had repeated opportunities in well-selected foster homes. They Have failed to fit in. Others have left their own homes and become vagrants and a prey on society.

Consider the boys who have had a poor home environment. Of the 200 referred to 11 had lost both parents by death; 33 had lost their fathers and 27 their mothers. 14 fathers had deserted; 5 whose mothers had deserted and 4 where both parents had deserted. The parents of 11 boys had separated; a total of 105 where homes were more or less broken. 15 fathers had been in Court and 5 mothers for various offences; 9 where either one or both parents were in public institutions.

Then in homes of others that have been held intact by parents conditions are not always ideal. In these times of depression when work is not easily obtained, with a consequent shortage of money, parents find it difficult to keep their homes attractive. Too often mothers are distracted and discouraged and they are finding life one continual struggle. Is it to be wondered at if children get out of hand. But even under more favourable conditions some parents fail in their responsibilities. They know little about training children. It is nagging, scolding, or fault-finding; dissensions between parents and lack of co-operation sometimes result in disrupted homes and delinquency in their children. I do not think I am far wrong in my conclusion that home conditions are responsible for much of the delinquency we find in boys. You will probably agree with me that boys brought up in such homes have a poor chance.

Permit me a word on the sub-normal boy handicapped from birth. He is not always responsible for his wrong-doing.

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The "gang element" is another factor. Boys are allowed to congregate on street corners. The gang element is all right if properly directed by wise leaders but too often there is no supervision. It is very important that we know how our boys spend their evenings.

The literature a boy reads, sensational stories, etc., shapes his thought.

I feel like blaming the cigarette habit in that it tends to blunt the boy's moral fibre and thus weakens his will power. The difference between mine and thine is a very hazy proposition. to the cigarettist. Meum and tuum are not in his lexicon. Larceny and lying are sprouts that grow from the same soil. Lying is a disease of the will.

Theft is given as the cause for over sixty per cent of the boys who find their way to the V.I.S. Most boys have what is called a conscience. This may reprove him the first time he commits a theft but repeated acts, especially if he is not detected, form in him the habit of thieving. His monitor is not heard so clearly. In time it becomes "seared as with a hot iron" and he no longer feels his wrong-doing. A boy is seldom caught in his first offence and so the second is easier. Every time a boy commits wrong and is not found out, he is a weaker boy.

Theft of autos is becoming too common. As a check upon this form of theft, owners should always lock their cars even if they are leaving them but for a few minutes. If every owner would take this precaution, theft of autos might be reduced to a minimum.

You will notice the number out of two hundred boys under sixteen years of age who were committed for serious offences against young girls. I make it a part of my instruction in a boy's education to speak to him about his personal habits, to counsel him in the proper care of his body. In nearly all cases, boys tell me that I am the only one who has spoken to them about this. Parents do not warn their sons. Seldom do teachers their ~~w~~pupils. I know it is a delicate subject and should be approached with great care. I submit that we owe it to our boys and girls to give them counsel when they come to the adolescent age on this most important subject. Our educational system should in some way provide instruction that may help boys and girls to think clearly on their personal relations. Boys are apt to form habits that are detrimental to their mental and physical development and all through ignorance.

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Even in our better homes there is a tendency to neglect boys. There is a time when they need their fathers, who should be willing to give some of their time at least to knowing their sons. They should make companions of them, take them into their confidence, go with them to ball games, the movie, on holiday jaunts. It pays to take some time from business affairs and rightly know our boys. Mothers too often let society claims intervene. Our homes should be made attractive, real homes, where the best books, music, etc., are found, where the parents live for their children.

How shall we train delinquent boys to become good citizens?

I believe the most important thing to do is to teach boys obedience and respect for Law. What success have you teachers had in teaching obedience to a wilfully disobedient boy? That has been my problem. Selfishness is the root of sin. All disobedience has its origin in selfishness. The cultivation of systematic habits of work and play are important factors. Not so much in work that a boy likes to do. There is little credit to me if I do well only those things I like to do. Discipline of the will comes to a boy when he schools himself to do the work he at first does not like doing. Said a well-known writer, "Thank God every morning that you have work to do during the day that you don't like doing." Learning to make a pair of boots, a suit of clothes, some article of furniture, may not be to a boy's liking. He finds it tedious. He has little interest in it. He is tempted many times to give it up. He comes to me and asks for a change of work. But he is kept at it day after day until it begins to take some form. He must learn not merely to begin a work but to complete it. In time he shows me a finished coat or a pair of boots, some article of wood-work, a printed sheet he has set up and run from the press. He is commended for his work. He is quite proud of his achievement. What in the beginning was tedious has become the work he likes. It is not so important that he is learning to produce something useful but in the process he has learned to subdue, in a measure at least, his selfish desire to throw up the job. In short, he has learned obedience through the self-discipline of his will. Honesty has also its place in his effort to do the best he can. There must be no slighting of his work, and it may be that he has been called on to correct the mistakes he has made. Herein is the value of well-directed work that leads to some definite result. It may be that the process is slow. It takes time to teach obedience. To illustrate this,--

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A few years ago I was asked if I would take a boy who had lost both his legs below the knee. I somewhat regretted taking him for he was a burden as you can readily see. In due time a pair of legs was purchased for him. It took him many months to learn to use them. I watched him as he fell on the sidewalk again and again but he picked himself up and tried again. Sometimes he complained that they hurt him and they were adjusted. I am sure he was very much discouraged at times, probably was tempted to throw them aside, but he stuck to it and finally mastered them. In the meantime he learned the tailoring and became quite an expert in this. He advanced rapidly in his studies at school and when he left at the age of seventeen years, he went out a strong, self-reliant lad, capable of making his own way in the world. I told this story to a Sunday School in one of our cities and asked the scholars what they thought was the most useful thing he had learned during his residence in the School. One thought his trade of tailoring, another his education, and still a third considered that the best lesson he had was obedience, for it was through his disobedience that he lost both his legs. But another lad added his contribution in this way, that the best thing the boy learned was to use his legs for in this he had conquered and proved himself a victor over his selfish desire to quit. A dogged, patient perseverance finally won out. No, obedience, honesty, and truth, are not learned in a day. A father came to me on one occasion and asked me if I would take his son into the School as he was giving him a great deal of trouble. "Two or three months with you, Mr. Ferrier, I think would make a man of him." I told him that we had no hot bed methods by which to obtain such a result. It is line upon line and precept upon precept.

Military drill finds a place in our programme chiefly for the reason that it inculcates in a boy prompt obedience and self-control.

A well-directed play-ground has its place in the training of boys for here they must learn to give and take. One must respect the rights of others. Selfishness has no place in clean, honest sport.

Probably above all else, I should place religion, the highest form of instruction in that it deals with spiritual things. And so our School has its hours when the higher demands of the soul are featured. Illustrated lessons on the best men, whose lives adorn the pages of history both sacred and profane, and in these none are so appealing to the average lad as the peerless Boy, Christ.

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Sheet 6.

There are some things I have learned from the boys that I have long associated with, these underprivileged lads, who have had a poor chance. Permit me to pass on to you some of these. Never call a boy bad. I have met with very few bad boys. You accomplish nothing by calling him names. You gain rather his ill will. Do not adversely criticize or nag a boy before his comrades. This also is useless. Never be too busy that you cannot find time to hear a boy who wants to confide in you, to tell you his trouble. Listen sympathetically. Never lose faith in a boy no matter what his failures and faults. Still believe in him.

An almost infinite patience, tact, a cheery nature, a helpful spirit, sympathy and charity, the charity "that suffers long and is kind, that hopeth and endureth all things." These are some of the qualities required in those who undertake the arduous task of helping the boy who has had a poor chance.

C. FERRIER,

Superintendent